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ABSTRACT

In rural Joshua Independent School District (Texas), students with mild disabilities were included in regular kindergarten classrooms. The special education teacher and kindergarten teachers developed a program in which 5-year-old children who qualify for Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD) are placed in regular and developmental kindergarten classes and are served by regular and special education staff. Low-verbal children use augmentative devices to communicate in kindergarten. During the first year of implementation, special education staff conducted small-group lessons during center time. The PPCD students and any others who needed help came to the small groups. The next year, special education staff worked in the regular classroom during lesson time to team teach, conduct small-group review sessions, and redirect off-task behavior while the teacher presented lessons. The program required a change in the traditional roles of both regular and special education teachers. Program success required much joint planning, collaboration, and flexibility. Student success is evaluated with teacher observation, portfolios, competency testing, individual education plan reviews, and the Early Prevention of School Failure screening. Overall program success is evaluated through interviews with teachers, parents, and administrators. Review of these evaluations shows that the program has been successful for both disabled and nondisabled students. (KS)

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ED 369 614

ENGINEERING THE CLASSROOM TO PROMOTE INCLUSION

Joshua Independent School District is located in a rural community south of Fort Worth, Texas and just west of Interstate 35. The majority of the residents are employed outside the county. Joshua Elementary is home campus to 865 students aged 3 to 8 years old. Programs include Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), Prekindergarten, Developmental Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Prefirst, First grade, Second grade,Special Education services, and Chapter 1 services. Children served through PPCD, other Special Education services,Prekindergarten, Developmental Kindergarten, Prefirst, and Chapter 1 must meet eligibility criteria to receive those services

During the Spring of 1992, the kindergarten teachers with the special education teacher of the preschool program discussed the possibility of serving students with mild disabilities in the regular class. The regular teachers were promised supports in the way of materials that would help the disabled students as well as other students and perhaps another adult in the room to help as time and schedules allowed. Later that spring, the district voted to implement all day kindergarten. That was the right time to implement our plan.

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The PPCD teacher and kindergarten teachers worked together to develop a program in which all children were taught in the regular classroom. We attended state sponsored workshops including Early Learning Together and The Early Childhood Summer Institute. We also read books and articles from professional publications dealing with inclusion. Through much collaboration and planning, we developed a plan in which five year old children who qualify for PPCD are placed in regular and developmental kindergarten classes and are served by both regular and special education staff.

The inclusion program was implemented in the Fall of 1992 in one regular kindergarten and two developmental kindergarten classrooms. The five year old PPCD children were placed in either developmental or regular kindergarten classes based upon the severity of their disability. Each became a member of his/her kindergarten class. Due to the previous use of augmentative communication devices in the PPCD program low verbal children achieved success in regular kindergarten. These devices included picture vocabularies, computers and appropriate software, loop tapes, switch activated devices, the Speak Easy and Introtalker. That year, the special education staff helped the regular education staff by conducting small group lessons during center time. The PPCD students and any others who needed help came to those small groups. The special education staff reviewed and retaught skills that were presented by the kindergarten teacher during lesson time that day. After reviewing data collected on student success, and teacher input, changes were made in the program. This year special education staff are working in the regular classroom during lesson time. They team teach, conduct small group review sessions, and

redirect off task behavior while the teacher is presenting lessons. The special education staff continues to provide resources for and knowledge about the special children in the regular classes.

The implementation of this strategy has required a change in the traditional roles of both the special education personnel and the regular education personnel. Program success has required much joint planning and collaboration. Since teachers come from different backgrounds, they bring different ideas and expectations to the relationship. It is important that all parties feel they can be contributing members of the program. Special educators' roles change in that they become consultants to the regular educators. They provide support to regular educators by passing on knowledge of disabled students and their needs and capabilities. They give teachers alternative methods to help the special and regular education student accept each other as contributing members of the classroom. Special educators have to give up some of their control in that they give up their own classrooms to work in the classrooms of others. For the success of the program, special educators need to be flexible and able to work within the boundaries of another's class. Regular educators also must change their roles to insure a successful program. They, too, give up some of their control by sharing some of the responsibility of planning and allowing another teacher some power in their classroom. Teachers may need to overcome attitudes about special education students and teachers. They need to be aware of differences in abilities and learning styles and be able to address those differences when other students start noticing them. Regular educators may need to modify expectations of special education students by using

different evaluation procedures, and accepting information in different ways. For example, using manipulatives or accepting verbal rather than written answers. For all people involved, flexibility is a must. Each person should be willing to learn new teaching styles, try new ideas, accept others' ideas, and do things jointly. Everyone should be willing to break out of old routines.

The success of this program has been evaluated in a variety of ways. Student success is evaluated with teacher observation, portfolios, competency testing, Individual Education Plans (IEP) reviews., and the Early Prevention of School Failure (EPSF) screening. EPSF is a nationally validated battery of tests designed to determine the developmental levels and learning styles of four to six year old children. We use the EPSF as a pretest and post test. Overall program success is evaluated through interviews of teachers, parents and administrators. Another measure of success is that students who have participated in this program have continued to be placed in less restrictive enviornments.

Review of these evaluations shows that in the two years the program has been in effect it has been successful. There has been an increase in EPSF scores in all areas. Those areas are receptive language, expressive language, auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, visual memory, fine motor skills, and gross motor skills. The most notable increases have occurred in receptive language where some children have increased scores by two years. Children with disabilities have benefited from being in a regular class where there are peers to model behavior and expectations are higher. Children who do

not qualify for special services have benefited form having extra support from the special education staff. All children have benefited from being in the classroom together on a daily basis. Self esteem increases for disabled students when they have success in a regular class. Self esteem for non disabled students increases when they learn they can help their peers. All students learn lessons from each other. Social behavior and acceptance of differences has increased for disabled and non disabled students. Students who participated in the program last year required less special education support this year and are accepted members of the regular class to which they have been assigned.

We believe that all students belong to the regualar community and the regular program. By giving special education support within the regular class placement, more children will become more caring and more successful. Some students may continue to need some pull out support. Our goal is to provide all services possible in the regular program. This includes support services such as occupational therapy, speech therapy and physical therapy. Our next step is to work with local day care centers to include disabled three year old children in a program with their non disabled peers. Stainback and Stainback (1990) define inclusive schools as places "where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported, by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met." This is our vision for our school.

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